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Rawie, Henry

If dreams come true in old
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New York

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IF DREAMS CAME TRUE IN OLD NEW YORK

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**BY
HENRY RAWIE**

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IF DREAMS CAME TRUE IN OLD NEW YORK.

HAVE you ever had a moving-picture dream? It is the newest thing in dreams. You go to the movies in the ordinary way, and the first thing to attract your attention is the fact that instead of hearing an occasional word uttered in the picture you suddenly hear all the conversation and other sounds.

This change has the strange effect of so increasing the excitement of the drama as to pull you from your place in the audience and make you take part in the action of the picture. You find yourself running to the aid of the beautiful girl detective imprisoned in a dynamite magazine, and just as you are about to stamp out the fizzing fuse the explosion takes place and you are blown out of the picture and into your place with the audience again.

This sudden whirl of being blown up by dynamite does not wake you, as it would in an ordinary dream, but makes you wait on the next move of the villain in the play; and, as you look ahead a sign appears, "A moment please to change the picture."

The dream I am about to relate was of this kind, and had its origin at a time when I joined some friends at our favorite eating-place. They were two builders, an architect, a real-estate agent, and a mortgage-loan broker.

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Now I have no interest in doleful conversation at meals, thrashing out the day's wash, telling one another about bad business. It helps a dinner to talk about the money you made that day and the money you expect to make; but your appetite is spoiled when tales of woe butter your parsnips.

Not being particularly interested in the troubles of other people, about real estate, mortgage loans, and building-stagnancy, I had more time to devote to my vulgar appetite and made up for my lack of interest in the conversation by an increased consumption of the good things at the table, hence my dream. As the dream that night was born at this dinner the fact that it was a moving-picture dream allows me now to recall what otherwise would have been forgotten in a common dream; it had its effect on my subconscious mind, as it were.

The conversation at table started as a hard-times debate on each man's business, each one saying there had been no recovery in business since the panic of 1907, and that conditions in real estate, mortgage loans and building were growing worse each year.

After each of the others had satisfied his grief and sobbed out his own story, the architect was permitted to do most of the talking. He got on the job by saying that building controlled the real-estate, mortgage-loan, and labor markets and that the trouble was much deeper than appeared on the surface.

I remember well what otherwise I might have forgotten from the architect's insisting that all progress depended upon building; using that term to include

all productive capital. History, he said, was nothing but a record of building operations, and civilization itself has its origin in the growth of cities; that when the world seemed to have finished its building it would be ready for its decline and fall.

In my dream I saw this great city of New York about to fall, and it was I who saved it from everlasting ruin—in my dream.

The architect had made an eloquent speech. "The rise of the steel-constructed building," he said, "caused most of the present trouble, as it ushered in a new age of steam and electricity, the benefits of which must be distributed from city buildings.

"A new age of building is upon us in factories, shops, theaters, hotels, apartment-houses, railways, and shipping; buildings which the millions use; and they differ from the palaces of kings and nobles and the rich of other times when building was for the personal use of a small class only.

"It is impossible to have an over-production of wealth. After a certain accumulation of wealth has been reached, we can no longer find labor to double it or increase the total; we can then only maintain and reproduce wealth in better and higher efficiency. The demand for wealth can never be satisfied like the demand of other appetites. No people in the world could produce as much wealth as they desire.

"If the cost of land may once, and for all time, be taken out of the building-market and allow capital to get the full income at every location to repay its cost, then labor will be fully employed and wages will

rise to the highest rate the sale of the product can pay.

"An elevator apartment-building twenty stories high will multiply the acre of land it occupies into ten acres; and if all our apartments were of this kind, we should have plenty of land to waste in the most crowded parts of the city, and have light and air for every building and plenty of open spaces.

"We started land-owning in New York on the theory that each family might have its own home on a lot twenty-five by a hundred feet; and we could spread the increasing population out into the country on these narrow lots. But we soon learned that a city demands its best locations for something else than homes on twenty-five-foot lots. Factories, railway terminals, hotels, great stores, and other structures must have the central sites suitable to each line of business.

"The business city, in the midst of its millions of people, will not permit its workers to go into the country every night and return every morning, and we sought to overcome this difficulty by crowding the narrow lots with three-, four-, and five-story brick buildings at a great loss in physical comfort, health, light, and air.

"This change to crowded brick buildings from single homes was at first very profitable; but the rise in the cost of land soon compelled the new owners to pay all the gain in cost for land, only to find that the old buildings must give way to the new order of things.

"The steel-frame, elevator building cannot be profitably built on narrow lots. Each should have an acre of land and be given plenty of room to fall back for light and air as it rises in height. The first of the tall buildings on narrow lots have not only become unprofitable in themselves as competition has reduced rents, but they have made it almost impossible to build or rent in the same block by cutting off light and air from other narrow lots."

As the architect had worked the building problem out, the city should finance every building the income of which came from the public, and should decide the general character, keeping retail and hotel districts separate from manufacturing, and providing the best possible living conditions for the apartment dwellers.

This plan, of the city financing building for the lot-owners, was bitterly opposed by the real-estate agent and the mortgage-loan broker, while the builders very naturally favored the plan; and to further illustrate the idea the architect brought out another important fact.

"You will admit without argument," he said, "that the city of New York must sooner or later provide more north-and-south avenues, especially on the west side between Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River, and between Greenwich Village and Seventy-second Street. Suppose the business and property interests on the west side were to unite in demanding a new avenue between Eighth and Ninth to relieve the congestion of traffic between Greenwich Village on the south and Sixty-second Street on the north: how

would the city meet this demand?

"The east-and-west streets are but two-hundred feet between while those running north and south have a thousand feet between avenues, and the tide of travel is much heavier from south to north than from east to west.

"It would cost a barrel of money of course; but cost is not the main item, for it would make several barrels of profit money in new frontage along the new avenue. There would be two feet of new avenue front added for each foot of side street taken.

"The city would have to buy a strip of land a hundred feet wide with buildings upon it in the heart of Manhattan Island, but in its turn it would confer immense benefits on a strip of land two-hundred feet deep on each side of the new avenue; and it could assess the cost on this area getting the benefit.

"The city however might fail in its financing, if it merely gutted out a strip of land a hundred feet wide and improved this avenue with paving, sewers, water, and light for the expected buildings upon it. Certain narrow lots would cut off all other lots from access to the new avenue; and their owners, like dogs in a manger, unable to build to the required depth, would demand toll from other lots that would not get to the new street line. The benefits from the new avenue would be enormously increased if it was lined throughout its length from Greenwich Village to Sixty-second Street with new and modern buildings on ample grounds and suitable to each location. It would stand the city well in hand to finance all the

building to two-hundred-feet deep for abutting owners as well as to finance the improvement of the avenue itself."

There was a wide difference of opinion concerning this ambitious scheme at the table, more especially because of politics and banking. The sale of great amounts of securities seemed to bar the way, although it was admitted that each building could support its own securities from its collections of rent.

The Dream.

On my way home, some time after this dinner, I stopped in a movie, and there was added the final touch that was to send my subconscious mind on its fascinating excursion that night.

The picture shown on the screen was one of those tricks of the photograph, taken at intervals during four or five months and condensed into a single-reel picture showing a building grow before your astonished eyes like the magician's plant on the stage at the waving of his wand. I was here to be haunted by the same building ghost as at the dinner, of which even then I was still too full.

Soon after, I was in bed and supposedly sound asleep; but by the appearance of the bedding in the morning I must have been doing some moving-picture stunts in my dream that night, for the upper sheet was wrapped like a rope in a tight coil about my neck.

I dreamed of going into a movie show as usual, taking my seat far back. The first picture was of a riot among the unemployed in New York City, with

yelling mobs, whose every cry I heard, surging, fighting, killing, burning, and destroying from one end of the city to another.

The cries, the speeches, and the sounds were all distinct; and seeing my friends in danger I was soon a part of this seething mob. A cry started at one end and spread like a prairie fire; "the soldiers are coming," and soon the soldiers came, driving the people before them into the side streets like scurrying leaves before a wind.

The crush of these rushing men landed me under what seemed to be a thousand feet tramping down on my digestion. I weigh only about a hundred pounds; and just as horses, pulling a rapid-fire gun, were about to complete trampling me under hoofs, a big policeman gave me a toss that seemed to send me up and up; and, when about to hit the ground, I dropped into my seat again.

The picture following this was of most exciting times before an election, more exciting than ever happened in any city. Talk about "rills of oily eloquence and thundering cataracts of declamation"—they were as nothing when compared with the flow of speech in this political campaign. Riots started between conflicting factions every hour, but were quickly put down by the military power then in control of the city. Every man, woman, and child seemed to be talking, but few ventured to throw stones.

The military control over the city was a sight to educate the eye and point a moral to the understanding, to show how uprisings among the unemployed

can make little headway, and how that little spills the blood of the innocents by a slaughter of defenseless women and children.

I soon became aware that my friends of the dinner were leaders in this pre-election fight but were divided and in hostile camps; the builder and architect advocating the expenditure of billions of dollars by the city to finance new avenues and buildings along them, while the real-estate agent and the mortgage-loan broker were leading the opposition.

I was in the midst of the most peculiar political situation any imagination could invent. In every political campaign of my experience one side would accuse the other of trying to ruin the country with hard times, each saying it alone could insure prosperity.

I had great difficulty in making heads or tails of this discussion. It seemed to turn on promising too much prosperity, which no one denied would result from spending billions of dollars on new streets and lining them with new buildings. Here was the opposition asserting that the city would be ruined by too much prosperity; that the high wages of the working classes would increase drunkenness and vice, idleness and crime; that poverty, when all was considered, was not so bad and was in its way a great blessing to the people who had to work for a living. The political excitement was created by an attempt to have the city provide new avenues north and south on the west side and to line them with great new buildings and apartments, principally for the work-

ing classes, taking an acre of land for each building by combining the small holdings and by giving the new building to the former owners after the city's money had been insured.

This movement had the support of the business and property interests of the entire west side of Manhattan Island and of nearly all the labor organizations, and it soon became so formidable as to alarm the banking and other property interests.

The "West Side or Hudson Hustlers" party, as it was called, was soon opposed by owners on Broadway and Fifth Avenue, who quickly realized that only one north and south avenue lined with new buildings, though between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, would likely become the main business street on Manhattan Island.

These property-owners, combining with the banking interests and owners on the east side, soon aroused considerable opposition to the Hudson Hustlers, who were looked upon as the poor man's party.

Seeing my good friends so divided, while excitement was growing more intense every hour on account of the hundreds of millions of dollars to be spent, I sought some way of compromise between them, and I found it by proposing that the money should not be spent in any one section of the city to the injury of another but that a comprehensive plan should be undertaken to rebuild the entire city.

After a slight calculation I was able to prove that the labor and material required for the proposed plans could not be secured in less than fifteen years

and too much congestion would arise unless this activity was scattered over the entire city. Trade and traffic along the streets, with the increase in all lines of business from higher wages, would not admit of building more than one new street in any section of the city at the same time; success must be founded upon a careful calculation of improving each district with appropriate buildings in different parts of the city.

The first great demand, I said, for new buildings must come from changing the crowded and discreditable brick shambles in the tenement districts, and the increase in wages from this building demand would then provide the greater purchasing power to increase rents in the business districts.

This compromise was readily adopted, because times were very bad and every one was anxious to get the billions of dollars into active circulation among the millions of people. As soon as the manner of building in each district could be agreed upon the excitement came to an end; and after all this had been settled I just naturally walked out of the picture and became a part of the audience again.

Next was a picture of a night scene in the business sections of New York City, a scene of unparalleled prosperity. The city was strangely altered; instead of only one business center around Times Square there were a number very much more active and incomparably more beautiful.

The political administration had taken a wholly different aspect. Traffic had become so enormous

and profits so great, that the tides of industry were put into the hands of experts, as was politics also.

The joy of working, and of being appreciated in any kind of work, seemed to shine out from millions of glad eyes. I came into the picture again as I recognized the voices of my friends coming down the street and about to enter a strangely appearing restaurant. Feeling as hungry as I had never been before and yet more hungry for information about the new city, I joined them at another dinner.

Getting news was most exasperating, for knowing nothing I was supposed to know all that had taken place during several years—such is the nature of dreams. There was no dallying at this meal; everyone was eager to return to work. It was near midnight but there was a glow of happiness on every face, each thinking of the work all were engaged in.

The working day, I soon found out, had been divided into four shifts of six hours each, and great difficulty had been experienced in keeping the people from working too many hours, both men and women. There was no talk of reducing the hours of labor and of over-production; every one was eager to buy securities with surplus wages, and every one was a liberal spender for the good things of life.

Labor became very scarce. As soon as the building demand spread to other labor markets, all the unemployed everywhere were taken up; and work had become a part of education in the schools, so great was the need of production.

No other fields could release labor for building,

which had spread from New York City all over the country and, as I was told, was then spreading over the whole civilized world. Food supplies were in greater demand, and in greater variety, calling for more labor, as did all other living demands. Transportation made enormous new demands, which only machinery might supply. The rate of wages rose rapidly to the maximum, which paid to labor the entire selling price of its product. Profits were also enormous, and the accumulation of wealth was ever changing hands as these profits were spent, thus dividing property between the working classes and the business classes.

Money was very abundant, but it was principally bank-check money. No new money had been printed or coined, I was told; every laborer had not only a bank account but also owned dividend-paying securities, and wealth was very widely distributed.

Where did all this money, to perform these Aladdin wonders come from, I asked, and the question seemed to astonish my friends as if it was not the most natural thing in the world to have as much money in use as the quantity of wealth and living might demand. It came, they said, from the city financing building in a new way—the new buildings could all be filled at profitable rents, and each building sustained the value of its own securities from its own rents, the city acting as trustee, collecting the rents.

Money was plentiful because there had been a very simple change in paying securities. No one now had to wait five, ten, or twenty years for bonds or

mortgages to mature, or take any risk in prices of stocks falling. Every security was insured and was protected by a reserve the same as bank deposits had been ever since banking came into existence. Banking was the most successful business in the world, and what had been done was simply to make all lines of business as sure and as successful as the banking business. The wages of labor contained a surplus above all needs of spending for a living; and this surplus exactly equalled the demand for money from the securities sold to erect buildings, so that the demand for money and the supply of money were always equal in a cash market.

Cash money was only used in hand-to-hand transactions, and bank checks were in almost universal use over the city—branch banks seeming as plentiful as grocery stores had been. There was no competition to reduce prices; the difficulty was to keep supplies on hand. There were no bargain sales, and no one grumbled at another's profits; everyone had plenty.

The appearance of new buildings was next to attract my amazed attention. There were no plate-glass fronts, no window displays. Imposing entrances were seen at every building. There was plenty of space; land seemed to cost nothing and to be plentiful everywhere. Architects had full play, with money enough in circulation to pay profitable prices for every class of building.

The rise in height among the apartment houses had obliterated the crowded districts, and small parks abounded. One block in every five was an open

park space—room for everything was the most noticeable fact in the whole city.

In driving about the newly-built sections with my friends they became very enthusiastic over the unlooked-for success of all their plans. Improvement had steadily gone ahead without disturbing the trade or comfort of the people. Rebuilding the city had been like rebuilding a great railway system without changing the schedule of a single passenger or freight train.

The greatest attraction to my mind was the new style of architecture the finance-system had developed. The most beautiful as well as the most useful buildings were the ones that could sell their securities to the public to the best advantage; and beauty in building became the same as beauty in all other lines. It had to conform to the highest taste and instinct for loveliness among the whole people.

There were no longer the frowning cliffs of buildings rising straight and sheer from the sidewalks, which appeared to lean into the street at the top. Each building rose in terraced stories to an imposing height with green plants along that gave the street the pleasing appearance of a verdant valley, rocks covered with foliage.

Just as we were getting into the car to return, a rasping, rumbling sound grated in my ears, as if an earthquake was upon us and buildings were tumbling down. It was only the alarm clock and my dream was at an end.

But who shall say the dream was at an end? Who shall say it was all a dream? Far, far better would it be if old New York was but a dream where we seem now so wide awake; a hideous dream of a civilization handed down to us from a murderous past of war and conquest, with slave institutions coming to us unchanged in actual distress from ancient times.

This civilization will some day seem an opium dream such as De Quincey suffered, "Buried for a thousand years in stone coffins with mummies and sphinxes in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids, kissed with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and laid, confused with unutterable slimy things, among reeds and Nilotic mud."

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